

Papermaker recalls mill's early days

The story of papermaking at Camas is the story of people.

It's about the beater operators, the papermakers, the millwrights, the office workers. It's about thousands of people, who, through their sweat, creativity and perseverance, have made Camas mill the thriving operation it is today.

It's about people like Vince Ast, a third-generation mill worker who dedicated 45 years to Crown Zellerbach.

"My grandfather, Bede Butler, helped lay the foundation for the original mill," stated Ast, obviously proud of his family.

Later, his father went to work at the mill, followed by Ast in 1933.

Waited for a job

"Back then, the street used to run away into the mill, where the main office now stands," he reminisced. "I sat on the curb seven weeks — seven weeks of playing pinochle, waiting for a job."

Finally, the personnel manager, Vic Gault, came out of his office looking for 15 men to lead a barge of conwood.

"There were 16 of us waiting for a chance to work," said Ast. "He flipped a coin and I lost."

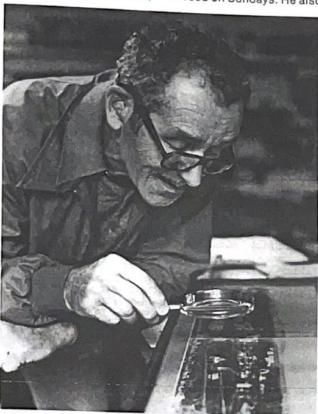
After two more weeks on the curb, Gault asked the 18-year-old Ast what kind of work he was interested in.

"I told him I wanted a job that had the opportunity for advancement — quite a motivator for a kid back in '33, wasn't it?"

No training

Ast was hired at the rate of 33½ cents an hour and was assigned to No. 5 paper machine.

"I stood there with my hands in my pockets, not knowing what to do. Financially, the backslacker, who was busy chewing tobacco, told me to 'stand there, look smart and act busy as



Third generation papermaker Vince Ast looks at an old photo of Camas.

admitted Ast. "I can truthfully say that I enjoyed working at the mill. My fondest memory is of the company's pride in its craftsmanship I had with my co-workers. I also took great pleasure — pride, if you want to call it that — in putting out quality products that satisfied our customers."

remembers a period during the depression when shifts were six hours.

Safety was a concern

but not as sophisticated as

according to Ast. "In the

early days, hearing protection consisted of stuffing a

wad of cotton in your ears.

You could tell an old paper-

maker by the missing fingers on his hands."

He also remembers the

thousands of out-of-staters

who passed through

Camas to work at the mill

while 400 employees went

off to win the war.

"Some of the same fellows

got off the train from Ken-

tucky and went straight to work," he said. "I remember that for a favor or two, I could use their sugar

cookies."

He also has memories of

making citrus paper on No.

2 ("a real aggravation"); the

time he had paper machine

breaks in 6 hours ("I

had to drag out the wet

paper and throw it in a

beater"); and when the mill

needed pulp for core stock

("I passed through the trash

looking for scraps of paper

to re-pulp").

1948 flood

He also remembers living

in the MacMaster Building

on the corner of 11th and

newlyweds in 1937 and

rowing a boat in the mill

basement during the flood

of '48.

Some of his memories

stretch back to before he

began his career with

Crown Zellerbach — from

experiences he had as a

youngster and stories told

to him by his father and

grandfather.

In fact, Ast is probably

one of the leading authorities

on the history of

Camas mill — for the past

three years, he has served

as president of the Camas

Washougal Historical

Society. He also served

as a trustee of the

advent of electrical power in 1913,

Ast believes the biggest

change has occurred in the

area of environmental pro-

tection.

ment. Camas is certainly

good enough for me."

Joe Tesson, millwright,

began working in the mill

in the early 1920s and

helped build the second

mill, which is still standing

as that portion of the mill

occupied by Nos. 3, 7 and 8

beater room. Our present

No. 8 was the only machine

in the old mill and I helped

make about four or five

tons a day, which was con-

sidered a record in those

days. That is quite different

from the 200 tons a day

we beat now.

"I have seen every ma-

chine installed in the Ca-

mas mill and followed with

great interest its develop-

"The kraft mill used to be

"unbearable," stated Ast. "It

smelled like burning

baggage. People were afraid

to leave their laundry out

to dry — if the wind turned,

it could leave your clothes

covered with ash. If you

were fishing and left your

shoes out too long, it'd be

coated with slime when

you pulled it out."

"Now," continued Ast,

"it's unbelievable what

they've done. There have

been tremendous improve-

ments in both air and water

quality. Our environment is

clean, but it cost a heck of

a lot of money."

45-year career

In reflecting upon his

45-year career, Ast said,

"Unquestionably, my father

and grandfather who laid the

foundation that are still

standing, I have contrib-

uted nothing 'concrete'

or 'visible' to the mill opera-

tion. But, perhaps there is

evidently what I was there

— and my suggestions

and ideas that hopefully

have made Camas mill a

better business and a bet-

ter place to work."

"Each generation must

appreciate what the older

ones did," he continued.

"Because of my sacrifices

— and the sacrifices of the

people who came before

me — today's workers can

enjoy a safer, easier way to

make a living."

These last hundred years?

"Unless there's a calamity,

Crown Zellerbach will

continue to protect the en-

vironment and raise trees.

There will always be a

market for paper, and I'm

sure Camas mill will. What

process will be like is

anybody's guess — just

look how far we've come

since 1883."

Second century begins

with modernization



Oldtimers tell about 'Ancient History' of mill

(Editor's note: Following are excerpts from an article, "Ancient History in Camas," published in the April, 1919, issue of *Makin' Paper*.)

Bede Butler claims to be the oldest man in the Camas mill. He says:

"I landed here in 1884 and began working on the foundation of the old mill, with the construction and installation of the machinery. The present No. 8 was the only machine in this mill. We made straw paper in those days. There were only about 25 or 30 men working here then and I was a sort of roustabout. I worked on every job from waterman to boss — that is, when the boss was sick."

Jack Harrington claims second honors with regard to age. He says:

"I came to Camas in 1886

as foreman in the finishing room in the old mill, but it

burned down about six months later, so I got a job

as hand beater and helped

build the second mill, which is still standing

as that portion of the mill

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